

**CDA Jacobsen's U.S. Independence Day Reception Speech**  
**Tuesday, August 23, 5:00 p.m.**

Dumelang, Bagaetsho!

Welcome to this celebration of the 246<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the independence of the United States of America! I am thrilled to be able to say that in person to all of you – this is the first time since 2019 that we have been able to mark the Fourth of July with our traditional reception. While COVID-19 still poses a major challenge to the world, together in Botswana we have made significant progress over the past two and a half years to prevent, detect, and treat the disease.

Since the start of the pandemic and due to our strong, enduring relationships with the Government of Botswana and implementing partners across the country, the U.S. government team has rapidly responded and reduced the spread of COVID-19 and mitigated the impact of the pandemic. Today Botswana has one of the highest vaccination rates in Africa with 71% of population having received a first dose and 64% of population fully vaccinated. The fact that we are able to gather here today, even if in smaller numbers than usual, is a testament to that.

I would like to recognize leaders of the Government of Botswana in attendance, members of the diplomatic corps, representatives of the business community, our civil society partners, educators and academics, and friends of the Embassy. You are all

key to forging the strong relationship between the United States and Botswana. We are honored to have Dr. Gladys Mokhawa, Permanent Secretary of Foreign Affairs representing President Mokgweetsi Masisi and the Government of Botswana. Dr. Mokhawa, the people of the United States appreciate and honor our enduring partnership. We look forward to building on this consequential relationship in the years to come.

As you know, the Fourth of July is an annual celebration of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, a revolutionary document that not only heralded the establishment of the United States, but also redefined democracy. Unalienable rights, a government that governs only with the consent of its citizens, and an affirmation that all people are created equal. These concepts, rare at the time of the Declaration's signing in 1776, have gone on to inspire democratic states around the world. This includes Botswana, with its deep respect for democracy, human rights, and good governance that embodies the spirit on which our own nation was founded. In many ways, the Declaration of Independence adopts the guiding values of botho, including its respect for fellow citizens, the collective responsibility of society, and the importance of being a good human being. I can't think of a concept that better captures the fundamental goals of democracy – life, liberty, and happiness.

It is important that we reflect on these ideals in the face of growing authoritarianism worldwide. Many states claim they are democracies even as they do

not respect democratic ideals or their own citizens. It is further proof that even repressive governments acknowledge the importance that ordinary citizens place in the promise of democracy and public participation, and that authoritarians fear the power of democratic change. Many of the conflicts we see today, such as Russia's unprovoked war in Ukraine, underscore this struggle between authoritarianism and the desire of people for self-determination and freedom. As President Biden has said, "Rather than breaking Ukrainian resolve, Russia's brutal tactics have strengthened the resolve."

In the United States, we see the Declaration of Independence as a starting point, a foundation to be built upon. When the founders of our country drafted it, their ideal of democracy and rights was focused on a narrow set of Americans - primarily white, male landowners. The 246 years that followed have been a long journey to make this definition broader, one that encompasses all citizens of the United States equally, and reflects a changing nation. This struggle has not been easy or without strife, and the struggle continues to this day. We see this in many democracies where citizens stand up for their rights for change and inclusion. The ability for democracies to evolve is the sign that democracy itself is working. Botswana is no exception. This country has made great strides over its 56-year history to expand the rights of its marginalized citizens and to commit itself to diversity and inclusion, including in the past year.

We see this in many facets of life. Very early on, Botswana took the HIV/AIDS crisis seriously and committed to partnering with the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, or PEPFAR, at a time when people with HIV and AIDS were widely stigmatized, including in the United States. As a result, Botswana has made major progress. To our collective pride, last month in Montreal, Canada, at the International AIDS Conference, the world learned that Botswana had achieved and exceeded the UNAIDS 95-95-95 targets: with 95% of the population being aware of their HIV status, 98% of those on treatment, and 98% of those are virally suppressed. In other words, Botswana is at 95-98-98 and nearing HIV epidemic control. The United States is proud of PEPFAR's partnership with the Government of Botswana to provide life-saving medications to thousands of people who now lead healthy lives. But the true credit goes to Botswana and its dedication to caring for all its people regardless of sex, age, citizenship, geography, religion, or sexual orientation, to truly provide equitable health services for all.

The November 2021 Court of Appeals decision is another example of this commitment to human rights and inclusion. The striking down of a colonial-era law targeting the LGBTQI+ population was a strong statement to the rest of the world about defending the rights of all citizens. President Masisi underscored this when he met with LGBTQI+ activists soon afterward and pledged the government's support for the community. This was a remarkable and noble step for a head of state. The United States is proud of its work to support the LGBTQI+ community in Botswana, and will

continue to work with Botswana to bring about lasting change. Much work remains to be done on achieving true equality and social acceptance in both of our countries, and Botswana has demonstrated that it is willing to work to make this a reality.

We see this willingness as well on gender. Botswana recognized that Gender-Based Violence was a major threat during the COVID-19 pandemic, and it took concrete steps to address it. The establishment of GBV courts, specialized police units to handle GBV crimes, and support for victims are all examples of this. GBV continues to be a major challenge globally, but Botswana has a clear strategy to protect those who suffer from it.

More broadly, women in Botswana are also assuming greater leadership roles. I am constantly impressed by how many women I meet who are entrepreneurs, leading businesses, holding high-ranking government posts, or leading civil society groups. In 2021, we partnered with the NGO Democracy Works Foundation to create a training academy for women interested in running for political office. We were thrilled that 60 women representing all of Botswana's political parties took part. We were also thrilled that President Masisi adopted this program as part of Botswana's commitments for democratic change at President Biden's Summit for Democracy. Women are still seriously underrepresented in Botswana's legislature, but we have seen strong evidence that many in Botswana's political class are working to change

that dynamic. The 2024 election will be a good measure on how far women have come.

Botswana made steps to expand the rights of the disabled during the past year. By ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in August 2021, Botswana committed itself to equal access to dignity, equality, and mobility for all its citizens. We are proud to report that two Botswana recently graduated from Gallaudet University in Washington, DC. Gallaudet University is the premiere higher education institution for the deaf and hard of hearing in the world. At the Embassy, we have made smaller but nevertheless important changes to support disabled persons, including a new ramp to the chancery entrance and a visa window that is fully accessible. USAID colleagues recently traveled the country to meet with the deaf and hard-of-hearing community as well as those who provide services to them to better understand their needs and challenges.

President Biden will host the second stage of the Summit for Democracy in early 2023. Botswana will participate in this in-person Summit in Washington, just as it did in the first virtual event in December 2021. The Summit will focus on many of these democratic themes that I have mentioned – human rights, inclusion, and democratic development. I was honored to speak at Botswana's joint summit in July with the Washington, D.C.-based National Democratic Institute on the subject of Constitutionalism in an African context. Hosting the summit here in Gaborone was

one of the commitments that Botswana made at President Biden's first Summit for Democracy, and it embodies the spirit of the event, to reinforce and reinvigorate democracy during a time of great change in the world.

Strengthening democracy at home is a critical part of President Biden's foreign policy vision because we cannot be a credible advocate for democracy and human rights abroad if we are not demonstrating our commitment to these principles at home. We do not claim to be perfect. And the United States, as all countries, must reckon with its past. As we strive to "form a more perfect union", we move toward a more tolerant, inclusive, and equitable future. The United States is proud of the role we have played in advancing human rights and fundamental freedoms across the globe. We do it out of our deep conviction that every person is born free and equal in dignity and rights.

These are the ideals laid out in the Declaration of Independence, and they are the guiding force for our work at home and abroad. We constantly seek out partners who share these values, with whom we can work to promote these common ideals. Botswana is such a partner. So, I ask you to raise a glass in honor of our nation's birthday, in honor of Botswana and all that it has achieved and continues to achieve, and in honor of our enduring friendship and partnership.

Kealeboga!